

Message Text

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15

ACTION COA-02

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO AMEMBASSY RANGOON PRIORITY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 8680

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR EAID

SUBJECT: BURMESE SEIZURE OF SEAFDEC FISHERIES RESEARCH VESSEL

REF: RANGOON 1407

SUMMARY: THE PRESENT MEMBERSHIP OF SEAFDEC IS MADE UP OF JAPAN, MALAYSIA, THE PHILIPPINES, SINGAPORE, THAILAND, AND VIETNAM. THE UNITED STATES PROVIDED \$300,000 TO THIS REGIONAL UNDERTAKING DURING ITS FIRST FOUR YEARS, THE FINAL USG CONTRIBUTION HAVING BEEN MADE IN JANUARY 1973 WHICH WAS TO HAVE BEEN TOTALLY RE-LEASED BY DECEMBER 1973. ALL OF THE US CONTRIBUTIONS WERE OBLIGATED BY THIS LATTER DATE; FUNDS COVERING PROCUREMENT OF SOME EQUIPMENT AND INSURANCE MAY STILL NOT BE TOTALLY LIQUIDATED. DURING THE YEARS THAT THE US MADE THE FOREGOING CONTRIBUTIONS RED WAS INVITED TO SEND A STAFF MEMBER TO REGULAR MEETINGS OF THE SEAFDEC COUNCIL IN AN OBSERVER STATUS. THE USG IN AN OBSERVER STATUS WAS NEVER IN A POSITION TO PLAN OR EVALUATE THE ACTIVITIES OF THE TWO SEAFDEC VESSELS, THESE BEING ORDAINED BY THE SEAFDEC COUNCIL CONSISTING OF REPRESENTATIVES OF ALL MEMBER GOVERNMENTS, AND CARRIED OUT BY SEAFDEC OFFICIALS. END SUMMARY.

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1. FROM THE OUTSET JAPAN HAS REMAINED THE LARGEST SINGLE EXTERNAL

DONOR TO SEAFDEC, HAVING PROVIDED TWO MODERN 350 TON TRAWLERS AND MOST OF THE RESEARCH PERSONNEL WORKING ASHORE AND AFLOAT. SEAFDEC NOW HAS THREE CENTERS IN THREE OF ITS MEMBER NATIONS: (1) THE FISHERIES TRAINING CENTER IN THAILAND FROM WHICH THE TRAWLER "PAKNAM" OPERATES TRAINING PROSPECTIVE FISHERMEN FROM MEMBER COUNTRIES; (2) THE FISHERIES RESEARCH CENTER IN SINGAPORE FROM WHICH THE RESEARCH VESSEL "CHANGI" OPERATES CONDUCTING RESEARCH ON SPECIES OF OCEAN FISH FOR POSSIBLE COMMERCIAL EXPLOITATION; AND (3) THE AQUACULTURE CENTER IN THE PHILIPPINES.

2. DURING FISCAL YEARS 1970, 1972, AND 1973, THE UNITED STATES THROUGH RED MADE THREE GRANTS OF \$100,000 EACH TO COVER FOREIGN EXCHANGE COSTS OF CERTAIN EQUIPMENT AND OPERATIONAL EXPENSES. AT THAT TIME RED PERSONNEL MAINTAINED SUFFICIENT CONTACT WITH THE SEAFDEC ORGANIZATION TO ASSURE THAT USG FUNDS WERE PROPERLY SPENT AND ACCOUNTED FOR. SEAFDEC'S PROGRAMS AND THE ACTIVITIES OF ITS THREE CENTERS AND TWO VESSELS WERE DESIGNED BY PROFESSIONALS ON THE SEAFDEC STAFF, ALL OF WHOM ARE FROM MEMBER NATIONS. SEAFDEC STILL SENDS REPORTS OF ITS ACTIVITIES TO RED. FOR THE MOST PART THESE ARE INFORMAL AND WE BELIEVE ARE SENT SIMULTANEOUSLY TO ALL MEMBER NATIONS AND INTERESTED SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTIONS IN THE AREA. INCLUDED ARE THE CRUISE REPORTS OF BOTH THE "CHANGI" AND THE "PAKNAM".

3. BOTH THE "CHANGI" AND THE "PAKNAM" ARE MODERN SEAGOING VESSELS THOROUGHLY EQUIPPED WITH THE LATEST ELECTRONIC NAVIGATIONAL AND FISH-FINDING GEAR. ALMOST ALL OF THIS EQUIPMENT IS OF JAPANESE ORIGIN, HAVING BEEN INSTALLED WHEN THESE VESSELS WERE OUTFITTED IN JAPAN SHORTLY AFTER LAUNCHING. THE CRUISE REPORTS OF THE "CHANGI" SHOW THE EXACT LATITUDES AND LONGITUDES OF ALL TRAWLING DONE, WHICH FOR THE MOST PART WAS CARRIED OUT IN THE ANDAMAN SEA AND MALACCAN STRAITS. THE CRUISE REPORT MENTIONED IN REFTEL (FEBRUARY 16 TO MARCH 7) IS NOT IN RED FILES, BUT AN EARLIER ONE COVERING THE VESSELS CRUISE FROM JANUARY 5 TO 18, 1974 INDICATES THAT THE CLOSEST POINT OF APPROACH TO BURMA MADE BY THE "CHANGI" IN THAT VOYAGE WAS THIRTY-FIVE (35) MILES OFFSHORE. THE REGIONAL PRIVATE INVESTMENT OFFICER WHO HANDLED SEAFDEC AFFAIRS WHEN THE USG WAS A CONTRIBUTING PARTY DEPARTED FOR THE UNITED STATES LAST MONTH, SO WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT MATERIALS

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OR REPORTS HE MAY HAVE GIVEN TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE U.S. FIRM, INTER-OCEANIC FACTORS, INC.

4. WE FULLY UNDERSTAND EMBASSY'S CONCERN IN THIS MATTER. PLEASE ADVISE WHATEVER ELSE MIGHT BE USEFUL IN ASSISTING IN ESTABLISHING THE FACT THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN THE PLANNING OR EXECUTION OF THIS OR PREVIOUS VOYAGES OF THE "CHANGI".

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